



A MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION MONTHLY UPDATE

A MICHIGAN MIDDLE START PARTNER ORGANIZATION

NOVEMBER, 2005 * VOLUME 8 * NUMBER 4

Backwards Planning and Assessment

McTighe and Wiggins have helped many educators reform their teaching by offering teachers a new map for thinking about instruction. The process aligns with Covey's principle of "beginning with the end in mind." Essentially the first step in planning for effective teaching, according to McTighe and Wiggins, is to be very clear about one's intended outcomes.

The teacher's goals, objectives, or outcomes are very simply what one hopes the students will know or be able to do following the lesson or unit of instruction. As obvious as this may seem, many of us bypass this critical aspect of planning. We begin immediately with the activities, content, or strategies that we plan to use. We know that we want the students to read "*Where the Red Fern Grows*" or use the steps in the scientific method, or we have decided to use a jigsaw to accomplish the reading; what we have not clarified for ourselves or our students is exactly what we want them to know.

The second step of the backwards planning process involves identifying how we will determine if students are achieving the outcomes or goals we established. This involves two types of assessment: formative, informal, or ongoing assessment and formal or summative assessment. According to backwards planning, the first is last, or in other

words, the summative assessment is the one which should be designed first.

Why begin with summative assessment -- the one that is given at the end of the unit? It again helps the teacher clarify the learning. If the summative assessment, whether it is a skills test, a presentation, a performance, a pencil/paper test, or another written assignment, is designed prior to beginning the unit it will help focus the teaching. Will this cause teachers to "teach to the assessment (test)", hopefully it will! Educators want to know if students have achieved given standards and benchmarks and when teachers and students are clear about expectations, achievement is higher.

So if the summative assessment is written first (before teaching), what is informal or formative assessment? The purpose of formative assessment is to provide feedback for both the teacher and the student as to the learning process. Formative assessment may be as informal as the teacher noticing what kinds of questions students are asking, or paying attention to non-verbals which tells them the students are or are not "getting it." Formative assessments may also be quizzes and assignments which are collected by the teacher and reviewed. The intent is not evaluation, but rather to inform teaching and learning. This type of

assessment occurs all the time in classrooms. It is as one author stated, "like the cook tasting the soup." Teachers are able to make mid-course corrections, re-teach, or add challenges for students.

Backwards planning begins with identifying outcomes and next developing ways to assess achievement of those outcomes----two things which are often left to later in the planning/teaching process. Things which when identified first can lead to greater success for all students.

Inside this Issue

* Leadership Lifeline	page 2
* Teacher Topics	page 3
* Student Station	page 4
* Student Book Review	page 5
* Family Focus	page 6
* Resource Review	page 7
* Coaches Corner	page 8
* Request Freebie	page 8
* Contact Information	page 9





Leadership Lifeline

Finding Time

Professionals all share a common need for More Time--- more time for professional development, more time for professional dialogue, more time for building a professional learning community, more time for professional reading..... Principals often find themselves shopping for the precious commodity of time.

Below are a few ideas for finding time in the schedule to engage in important work. These thoughts were compiled by Gary Watts and Shari Castle. Hopefully some of these may help you arrange schedules to accomplish the important work of helping all adolescents improve outcomes.

Bank Time

- Lengthen the regular school day. "Save" the extra minutes to create larger blocks of time when teachers can plan or learn together.
- Create regularly scheduled early dismissal/late start days.
- Shave minutes off the lunch period and "save" that time for teacher learning time.

Buy Time

- Hire more teachers, clerks, and support staff to create smaller classes and/or expand or add planning and

learning times for teachers.

- Hire substitute teachers to fill-in for regular classroom teachers to enable those teachers to plan or learn together
- Add an extra teaching position in the school for a rotating substitute teacher who would regularly fill in for teachers in order to free them for planning or learning time.
- Create a substitute bank of "staff development substitute teachers" which regular classroom teachers can tap in order to participate in various forms of professional learning.

Common Time

- Use common planning time to enable teachers working with the same students, the same grade level, or the same subject to share information, collaborate on projects, or learn more about their shared interest.
- Organize "specials" into blocks of time to create common time for teachers with similar interests.
- Link planning periods to other non-instructional times, such as lunch periods, giving teachers the option to use their personal time for shared learning time.



Free Teachers from Instructional Time

- Enlist administrators to teach classes.
- Authorize teaching assistants and/or college interns to teach classes at regular intervals, always under the direction of a teacher.
- Team teachers so one teaches while the other plans or learns independently.
- Plan day-long, off-site field experiences for students in order to create a large block of time when teachers can learn.

Add Professional Days to the School Year

- Create multi-day summer learning institutes for teachers in order to ensure that they receive the necessary depth in areas of strategic importance for the district.
- Create a mid-year break for students and use those days for teacher learning.

Use Existing Time More Effectively

- Spread time from multi-school planning days across the calendar to provide more frequent, shorter school-based learning opportunities.

Taken from: National Staff Development Council: The Learning System November 2005.



Teacher Topics

The Power of Essential Questions

Regardless of grade level, few classroom experiences are as frustrating as the ominous silence that sometimes accompanies the introduction of new material. The connections to previous learning that appeared to be sure winners in your mind provide little comfort when blank expressions come your way. You think about all you need to cover to help students reach standards by testing time. But perhaps what is important to focus upon is not *coverage* but *UNcoverage*. Essential questions are one of the most critical components of inquiry-based learning. They address how teachers can tap into their students' minds to help them uncover what is worth knowing. More importantly, essential questions can help teachers understand the best time and place for their students to uncover critical knowledge.

Authentic essential questions are student-centered and come in almost as many varieties as there are children. Within the context of a particular unit of study, focused and age-appropriate essential questions can be generated to increase student engagement. In the following examples, an overall question such as "What does it mean to be an American?" can be easily customized to the levels of primary and middle grades, junior high, or high school students.

Essential questions not only deepen understanding of an overall curriculum, they can also be modified to explore important subcategories that have been broken down into specific lessons and units. For example, a history unit covering American industrialism could be made more engaging after students first consider "Do inventions always lead to social progress?" Such a question might be examined through a role-play, where students have the opportunity to experience conditions of workers at the beginning of the industrial revolution. They might later make presentations or write papers about their experiences as well as their research on the topic. Science teachers might precede a lesson on viruses with an essential question that encourages critical thinking such as "How does

a virus' relationship with its host support its survival?" or one that personalizes a problem-solving like "Why do doctors not give you medicine if you have a viral disease?" These questions have the potential for enhancing student understanding and thus achievement in science.

Good essential questions are collaborative, non-judgmental, and purposely open-ended. The key for successfully using essential questions always involves assessing for understanding *before* rather than *after* a topic is introduced. In other words, teachers must find out where their students are in relation to the new material. In exploring the central concepts of your curriculum, consider making your best practices more relevant for students. Apply these tips to develop and use essential questions:

- **Ask the students what the questions are.** Compose questions appropriate for your discipline or grade level; personalize them by using the words the students used in their responses.
- **Choose three questions that offer a meaningful way to focus on the content at hand.** Prioritize questions by their capacity to allow students to practice problem solving and critical thinking skills.
- **Display the essential questions in a conspicuous area of the classroom.** Make sure everyone understands the questions' meaning as well as their purpose.
- **Use the questions to probe for deeper meaning.** Organize activities, lessons, and units around the essential questions in your curriculum. Develop checks for understanding, quizzes and tests around these questions.

Taken from *Teacher Today* - October, 2005



Student Station

It's Thanksgiving Time!

It's November already! We're well into the school year; football season is ending and basketball and volleyball seasons are beginning; you've taken tests and written papers and read books; perhaps you have an orchestra concert coming up, or a band performance, or a school play. The long, lazy days of summer have given way to the early evenings, falling leaves, and crisp mornings of late autumn. Many of us are beginning to look ahead to the coming of the first snowfall, and to the short break from school and work that comes in late November.

So, how did this whole tradition of Thanksgiving get started, anyway? Actually, it originated many centuries ago, among the early agrarian societies. For about as long as human beings have planted wheat and corn and vegetables in the spring and nurtured them through the long summer, they have celebrated and given thanks at harvest time. After all, throughout most of human history, the difference between a bountiful harvest and a poor harvest has meant the difference between life and death!

In many early cultures, it was believed that the corn, wheat, and other plants had spirits living in them, which caused the plants to grow and then to die. Harvesting vegetables and grains was believed to unleash these spirits, and the harvest festival was seen as a way of celebrating the humans' triumph over them. In Ancient Greece and Rome, an annual harvest festival was held to honor the goddesses Demeter and Ceres, who were believed to provide good crops if they were pleased by their subjects' offerings. The ancient Chinese celebrated their harvest in late August by baking

special "moon cakes" which expressed gratitude for the bounty of the natural world.

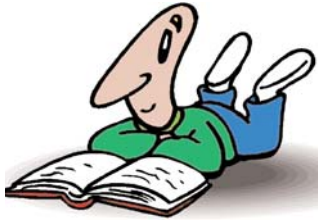
The practice of holding an annual fall feast to celebrate the harvest carried over into medieval times, and beyond. Even as late as the 17th and 18th centuries, the harvest feast was still primarily a way for the people to show gratitude for the food they had grown over the summer, which would feed them through the long winter.

For most of us in the United States today, there is little connection between what we grow in the summer and whether we have enough to eat over the winter. In fact, most of us do not actually grow any of the food that we eat! So, for many of us, the celebration of Thanksgiving has evolved from a harvest feast into a general celebration of gratitude for our lives and circumstances.

This year, when you sit down to your Thanksgiving meal, whether it's a turkey with all the trimmings or a TV dinner, take a minute to think about what the holiday means to you -- certainly, it's a welcome two-day vacation from school, but what else does it mean to you? What are some of the things in your life -- great or small -- for which you are grateful?

4





Student Book Review

The Hero and the Crown Author: Robin McKinley

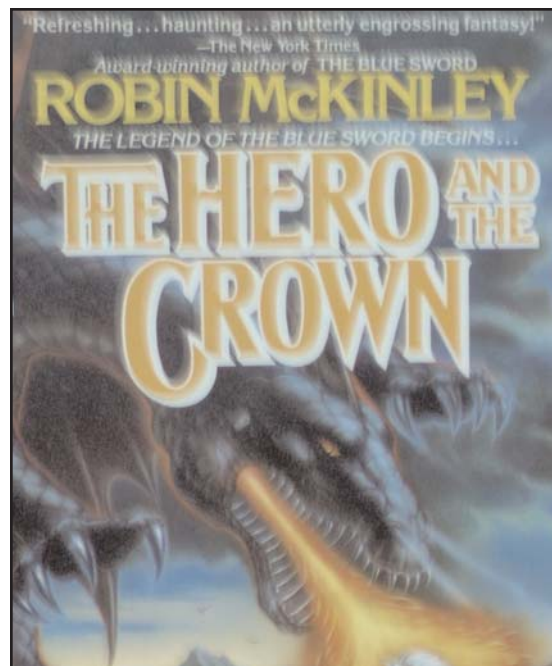
Aerin, princess of the land of Damar, has known all her life that her birth was a disappointment to her mother. She has grown up hearing the story of how her mother cast a spell on King Arlbeth of Damar and then married him, planning to get an heir who would rule the kingdom after Arlbeth's death. When she gave birth to a daughter instead of a son, the story runs, she turned her face to the wall and died of despair.

When Aerin asks to accompany her father on a quest to the western land of Nyrlol, Arlbeth's advisors treat her with scorn, and her father denies her request. Feeling deeply alone, and saddened that the typical royal Talents have not yet blossomed in her, Aerin seeks other ways to prove that she is a worthy member of the royal family. With her beloved horse, Talat -- formerly her father's warhorse, but crippled beyond healing in a long-ago battle -- she goes out in search of adventure. And what she finds is a calling and a destiny that even she could never have dreamed of... for Arien is destined to be the true hero who will wield the power of the Blue Sword.

One of the most interesting things about *The Hero and the Crown* is the way the author writes about a society that is, in many ways, very different from our own. As you read, you can be like a detective, piecing together the little clues and hints that the author leaves, and gradually building your understanding of Aerin's culture and people.

You may even find that, as a result of reading this book, you begin to look at your own life differently!

If you enjoy *The Hero and the Crown*, you may want to pick up its sequel, *The Blue Sword*, or others of Robin McKinley's books. You might also want to try some other books set in imaginary societies that are complex and thought-provoking. *The Giver*, *Gathering Blue*, and *Messenger*, all by Lois Lowry, are excellent and interesting books; so is *The Girl Who Owned The City*, by Linda Nelson; and *The Green Book*, by Jill Paton Walsh.





Family Focus

Letting Go: Independence and Your Young Adolescent

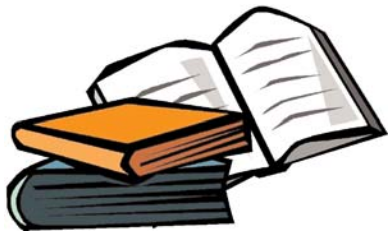
As kids leave childhood and enter early adolescence, they often begin to ask for more freedom and independence. As parents, you probably walk a tightrope... you want your kids to grow into confident and capable young adults who feel secure in facing the world, but you also know that there are many dangers in the world which your young adolescents may not be ready to handle. How do you find a balance between holding on and letting go? How do you give your kids the right kinds of freedom, at the right times?

Research shows that young adolescents do best when they keep close connections with their parents, but are also given the freedom to hold their own opinions, even when their opinions are different from those of their parents. Keeping your kids close means setting limits (and sticking to them), stating the limits clearly and explaining exactly what you mean, and establishing consequences (both positive and negative) for behaviors. Letting go means providing reasonable options and allowing your young adolescent to choose from among them, and granting independence in stages -- as your child demonstrates the ability to make mature and positive choices, give her progressively more freedom to make choices.

It is critical to remember that your most important job as a parent is to protect the health and safety of your child.

There are some decisions which your young adolescent is simply not mature enough to be able to make well. He needs to know that your love for him requires you to "put your foot down" and prohibit choices and activities that threaten his health and safety. This can be tough for young adolescents to accept, because they tend to feel that "nothing bad could happen" to them. Choices that cut off future options for your kids -- skipping school, for example, or taking up smoking -- are also choices that you, as a parent, have both the right and the responsibility to veto.

As younger children, your kids needed and welcomed firm parental control. It gave them a sense of security, a feeling that their parents were there to protect them. Young adolescents, by contrast, thrive on parenting which "guides" them but does not seek to "control" them. Young teens need opportunities to try out new hairstyles, different roles, new personalities, and a variety of activities. They need to be allowed to experiment and to make mistakes, and they need their parents to support them and to encourage them to bounce back after they fail. Don't hesitate to put your foot down if your child is experimenting with dangerous things, but on smaller issues, give her the chance to try, fail, bounce back, learn, grow, and succeed.



Resource Review

Restructuring Schools: Readings from Educational Leadership Ronald S. Brandt, Ed.

This collection pulls together the best essays and articles from *Educational Leadership* focused on the broad picture of restructuring schools. Beginning with six essays which examine the urgent need for restructuring, the book sounds a clarion call for educators and school leaders. It then provides a wealth of articles from top experts in the field of educational leadership, organized around central themes which have emerged over the past two decades of discussion on school reform.

A lengthy section on School and District Organization leads off the discussion, featuring numerous articles on school-based decision making, schools of choice, tracking and untracking, and outcome-based education. Of particular interest in this section are the articles "Site-Based Management: The Realities of Implementation," by Cynthia R. Harrison, Joellen P. Killion, and James E. Mitchell, which provides an in-depth look at the challenges and rewards of adopting a site-based management structure, and "On Tracking and Individual Differences: A Conversation with Jeannie Oakes," by John O'Neil, which offers an important look at the realities of tracking and untracking.

A second section, entitled Professionalization of Teaching, argues that a crucial component of successful school restructuring will be the reversal of the common tendency to see teachers as, at most, lower-level professionals. Not only does the attitude of the general public need to change, but also teachers must come to see themselves as professionals constantly engaged in professional growth and learning. The essays in this section call for a new vision of teaching, changes in teacher education, and the embracing of new attitudes and values.

The next two sections deal with Curriculum and Instruction, and with Performance Assessment. In addition to insightful articles on curriculum -- and, in particular -- on science, the book investigates the

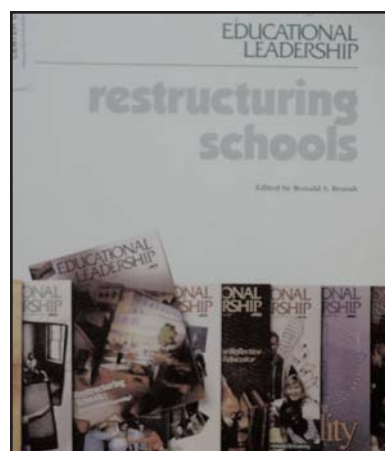
possibilities for integrating the use of computers into excellent instruction, the design and administration of challenging and relevant performance assessments, and the promise of integrated curriculum.

A lengthy section on The Restructuring Process follows, detailing the challenges and opportunities inherent in the re-shaping of a school. One particularly intriguing pair of articles, written one year apart, follow the process of restructuring at Littleton High School in Colorado. The authors, working with the school's administration and leadership team, guide the school through its first year of reform and restructuring, and reflect on what they have learned.

The book's final section, Leadership for Restructuring, offers articles which outline the roles of teachers and administrators in guiding and shaping the restructuring process. This section includes case studies of particular teachers and principals who have been instrumental in their respective schools' reform processes, providing insight and encouragement to those who follow in their paths.

Taken as a whole, this book provides an exhaustive look at the process of school restructuring and an invaluable resource to the forward-thinking teacher or administrator who wishes to serve as a catalyst to reform.

If you'd like to check out *Restructuring Schools*, call the Center at (989)774-7678 and ask to borrow Resource Number LSD-69.





Coaches Corner

Featuring Leadership Coaches

David Sellers is the newest addition to the Coaching Staff for Michigan Schools in the Middle. Dave is the Leadership Coach for Central Middle School in Saginaw. Dave brings a wealth of experience to this new position. He has thirty years of urban middle school teaching and administrative experience from Battle Creek Southwestern Middle School and Springfield Middle School. In 2004, he received an endorsement to work with high priority schools in Alliance for Building Capacity in Schools. He has served as a Facilitator for school improvement teams and Middle School workshops. In addition, Dave is a Trainer for ABCI (Quality Learning System) and has served as an athletic coach for grades 7-12.

Recently, Dave completed Visual Motor Skills Training to Improve Reading Skills and has completed MEAP Analysis Training. His educational background includes a Major in Health, Recreation, and Physical Education and a Master's Degree in Elementary Education from Western Michigan University. We are pleased to welcome Dave and wish him success in his new coaching role!

"Freebie"

The recipients of September's freebie books *Making Change* and *Understanding by Design* were: Nancy Flink -Central Middle School, Ada
Alison Race - Harper Woods Middle School
Dacia Darbee, Susan Cooley & Beth Kussro - Handy Middle School, Bay City

Recipients of October's freebie "The Middle Years" video sets were:
Bev Skinner - Standish Sterling Middle School
Kathy Dugall - Wyandot Middle School



The first three people to contact us this month will receive *Cooperative Learning* a book by Dr. Spencer Kagan. "The Single Most Comprehensive Book on Cooperative Learning."

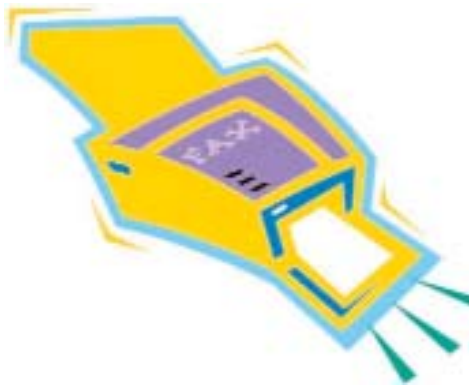
call 989-774-1198 or email duval1p@cmich.edu

Powerful Quote

"A community is like a ship;
everyone ought to be prepared
to take the helm."

---Henrik Ibsen

Contact us:



989-774-7684



www.schoolsinthemiddle.cmich.edu



989-774-7678



CMU - 678 Ronan
Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859



Happy Thanksgiving

Michigan Schools in the Middle is very thankful for all that you are doing for Michigan's Young Adolescents.

Our office will be closing at noon on November 23rd and will reopen at 8am on November 28th.

We would like to welcome Gwen Kelliher to the Michigan Schools in the Middle family. She will be our "financial" person and begins work on Monday November 7th. Her hours will be Monday to Friday 1pm - 5pm.

Gwen and her husband live in Mt. Pleasant with their two children.

Please join us in making Gwen feel welcome.

